英語コミュニケーションの授業におけるヨーロッパ言語共通参照枠（CEFR）と能力記述文（CDS）の使用

Jonathan B. Britten

Using the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and 'Can Do' Statements for English Communication Classes.

（2013年11月27日受理）

The purposes of this essay are: to outline the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) produced by the Council of Europe (COE); to discuss use of a textbook that provides 'can do' outcomes for each unit; to discuss the relationship of the CEFR to standardized tests; and to outline recent modification of the CEFR for use in Japan.

An Outline of the CEFR

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (COE, 2013) is a guideline for describing learner ability and intended learning outcomes, at various levels, in any language. Although developed by the Council of Europe to meet European needs, the CEFR now has a global reach, and has recently been adapted for use in Japan. The document is succinctly summarized in its first paragraph:

> The Common European Framework provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The description also covers the cultural context in which language is set. The Framework also defines levels of proficiency which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis. (COE 1)

The CEFR identifies six basic levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2. It also defines three 'plus' levels (A2+, B1+, B2+).

Learners at Level A2, such as sophomores taking English Communication at Nakamura Gakuen University, are described as having the following 'can do' skills:

> Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need. (COE 24)

Learners at Nakamura University use a textbook (*Four Corners*) that, in addition to the general skills cited above, specifies the following 'can do' outcomes for Listening, Reading, Spoken Interaction, Spoken Production, and Writing:

> LISTENING: I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment. I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.
>
> READING: I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material, such as

別刷請求先：Jonathan B. Britten，中村学園大学教育学部，〒814-0198　福岡市城南区別府5-7-1
E-mail：jbritten@nakamura-u.ac.jp

> advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables, and I can understand short, simple, personal letters.
> SPOKEN INTERACTION: I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.
> SPOKEN PRODUCTION: I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background, and my present or most recent job.
> WRITING: I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example, thanking someone for something. (Richards and Bohlke (Teacher's Edition) xxxiii)

Interest in the CEFR worldwide has grown steadily in the past decade, and Japan is no exception. Indeed, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has recently published guidelines (MEXT, 2013) for English proficiency that include 'can do' statements as a measure of student proficiency.

The Author's Experience with CEFR

The author became interested in the CEFR while attending a 2008 multilingualism conference in Essen, Germany. A major city in the heavily industrialized Ruhr Valley, Essen is dealing proactively with the challenges of a multi-cultural workforce and society. German enthusiasm for the CEFR was evident, and this author became interested in employing the framework for teaching in Japan. At that time, however, there were few mainstream English teaching materials based on the CEFR.

The recently published *Four Corners* textbook, cited above, is based on the CEFR and structured on 'can do' statements. The author decided to use this book for English Communication classes. The objective in using these materials is to promote learner autonomy, self-evaluation, self-directed learning, and lifelong learning.

The author also aimed to help students majoring in Education to get direct experience with the CEFR and 'can do' statements and outcomes. Education majors, especially those teaching in primary and secondary schools, need to understand the growing influence of the CEFR. They will need to deal with the CEFR in their employment. For these learners, the *Four Corners* textbook frees two birds from one cage: it fosters effective English language learning, and it helps learners understand by direct experience how CEFR 'can do' outcomes influence the way of learning.

The *Four Corners* emphasis is primarily on production and secondarily on acquisition, which corresponds with student needs at most Japanese universities. *Four Corners Two* corresponds with CEFR Level A2, and has proven appropriate for second-year students majoring in Education and in Nutrition.

The Teachers' Edition of the textbook provides ample support and thorough explanation of the materials, with detailed explanations of CEFR objectives for Listening, Reading, Spoken Interaction, Spoken Production, and Writing. Cambridge University Press provides an in-depth breakdown on the *Four Corners* Internet pages.

The content and structure correspond well with the Japanese college semester system of fifteen 90-minute classes; learners can complete the full course book within two semesters. Split editions are available for one-semester courses. The Teachers' Edition includes useful unit quizzes and comprehensive semester examinations.

Audio support for the textbook proved useful and well integrated. Learner textbooks include a self-study CD ROM. The material seems well chosen, easy to use, and useful for review of course material. Learners were urged to use the material weekly. The author has not used the optional, supplemental "courseware" materials.

Four Corners was evidently written for a global marketplace, and unfortunately no Japanese-language support is available in the student book or the CD-ROM. *Four Corners* learners in Japan would benefit from such materials. In particular, learners would appreciate a concise Japanese language explanation of the CEFR structure and

the can-do goals, which might be included in the CD-ROM. The author has suggested this and other changes to the publisher.

Overall, the *Four Corners* materials support the CEFR goals well, and most learners seemed engaged throughout the semester. Test results suggested good comprehension of the material studied over the course of the semester.

The Relationship of CEFR to Standardized Tests

The CEFR does not include any kind of standardized test and is not associated exclusively with any particular test. Producers of various standardized tests in various languages claim certain correlations with the CEFR levels.

The authors of *Four Corners Level Two* associate their Level 1 textbook with a TOEIC score of 120+, Level 2 with a TOEIC score of 225+, and Level Three and Level Four books with a much higher score of 550+. The associated scores for Level 1 and Level 2 seem reasonable, but the large gap between Levels Two and Levels Three /Four is unexplained, as is the absence of any distinction between Level Three and Four in terms of TOEIC scores. Another arguable deficiency is that the authors provide no correlation with the TOEFL iBT, the TOEFL PBT, or with the STEP test widely used in Japan. Correlating *Four Corners* with these tests might make the material more appealing to some university educators and students.

Efforts to link the CEFR to widely used test scores seem understandable and necessary. That said, one of the great merits of the CEFR is that it frees educators and learners alike from these various testing regimens, and gives everyone involved in the learning process clear 'can do' statements that learners themselves can understand. To say that one's TOEIC score is 500 conveys some information, but it's arguably much more valuable to state one's competence in plain statements of ability. Similarly, to inform learners that the goal of a class is to achieve a certain score on a test may be necessary and useful, but it's far more useful to state that the learner will be able to carry out certain tasks. This is particularly true when the intended purposes and outcomes are explicit and easily understood in terms of ***performance*** ('I can talk about a particular topic '); ***criteria/quality*** (simple/ very familiar); and ***condition*** (if people speak slowly and clearly and repeat and rephrase as necessary.)

Development of the CEFR-J

In recent years the CEFR has been adapted for the particular needs of Japanese learners of English, and labeled the CEFR-J. (CEFR-J website); (Tono and Negishi, 2012). The framework has been developed with government funding by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science [JSPS] with grants-in-aid for scientific research (***kaken***). The CEFR-J has twelve levels as follows:

[Pre-A1]
A1 [A1.1/ A1.2/ A1.3]
A2 [A2.1/ A2.2]
B1 [B1.1/ B1.2]
B2 [B2.1/ B2.2]
[C1]
[C2].

The project to develop the CEFR-J includes a CEFR-J Inventory of English; a word list totaling 6,000 words; and a list of 'can do' descriptors for the twelve levels above, totaling 110 descriptors in three categories: "Understanding," "Speaking," and "Writing." (Tono and Negishi, 2012).

Development of teaching materials based on the CEFR-J is fairly new and is ongoing. It has great potential to improve English language education in Japan. Sub-division of textbook material according to the CEFR-J levels, word lists and descriptors may eventually enable publishers focusing on the Japan market to produce integrated educational materials to facilitate ease of learning for students as they advance from elementary school to university.

College-level Education Department programs in Japan would benefit from explicit instruction about the CEFR-J, using both English and Japanese versions of the teaching material. The purpose of bilingual materials would be to combine the goals of providing content-based learning in English, and ensuring full comprehension of the CEFR-J in Japanese education. Guided discussion of

the CEFR-J in English might also be a beneficial language learning technique, perhaps for seminar students who wish to become specialists in English language instruction.

The salient point is that wide familiarity with the CEFR and CEFR-J is important because the frameworks will influence education at every level from elementary to tertiary, and probably, in time, pre-school education as well. Teachers, students, parents, and policy-makers should all be familiar with the framework.

Clearly defined curricula, syllabi and materials based on the CEFR-J may facilitate excellent teaching and learning based on consistent methodology and learning style. Textbooks and supporting materials (CDs, DVDs, online resources) could be integrated for sixteen years of English education, starting in 1st grade and continuing through the senior year of college. A single textbook series with a unifying theme and title could carry a learner through from first grade to college graduation. Keen competition between publishers might provide educators with a wide range of integrated solutions consistent with varying educational philosophies and aims. A unified sixteen-year curriculum would provide a consistent, well-structured syllabus for each grade level, mixing listening, speaking, reading and writing.

No such system, to my knowledge, exists in Japan today. An integrated curriculum could start at level Pre-A1 for elementary grades 1-3, and advance to level A1.1 for grades 3-6. In junior high school, learners might start with A 1.2 in 7th grade, advance to level A1.3 in 8th grade, and A2.1 in 9th grade. In high school, learners might begin with level A2.2 in 10th grade, level B1.1 in 11th grade, and level B1.2 in 12th grade. College freshmen might start with level B2.1, advancing as sophomores to level B 2.2.

Currently, it seems, there are almost no Level C1 and C2 learners in Japan, based on a recent survey of 7,171 employees of a Japanese company listed in the First Section of the Japanese Stock Exchange. (Negishi *et al*, 2011). An integrated sixteen-year curriculum based on the CEFR-J might result in some tertiary-level learners being able to study at the C1 and C2 levels. Such classes would be available as optional seminars for selected college juniors and seniors, with placement determined by written test, essay, and interview.

Developing a unified sixteen-year year curriculum with a linked, progressive syllabus may require a highly collaborative, multi-author project under a team of editors having the full support of a publishing company. Materials writers, directors, and editors (for DVD and Internet support materials) would cross boundaries between elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools, vocational schools, junior colleges, and four-year colleges and universities, in order to ensure a smooth progression between various levels.

If successful, an admittedly ambitious project of kind this might enjoy a substantial share of an English learning materials marketplace that is highly competitive, fragmented, and arguably too much driven by financial considerations and by short-lived educational theories, trends and fads. A major publishing company supporting such a project in Japan might use the expertise gained in Japan to undertake similar projects in other countries, based on a appropriate modifications of the CEFR (CEFR-K for Korea, CEFR-T for Thailand, CEFR-P for the Philippines, and so on.) Each integrated, multi-year curriculum would be based on regional and local understandings of learner needs, while taking advantage of work done by other regional educators working within the basic CEFR framework.

The report by Negishi *et al* of "virtually nil" Japanese with Level C English ability is important and deserves an own essay to explicate the implications and ramifications. Rapid changes in the global situation necessitate high-level communication between persons in various countries, and, increasingly, direct democracy by citizens worldwide. Negishi's study also indicates abysmally low numbers of employees at the B2 level (an average of about 3.5%), and only marginally better results at the B1 level (an average of about 10%.)

This is useful data because it enables company owners and managers and governmental policy makers and others to judge more clearly what these employees can — and cannot — do, and

the costs to Japanese society as a whole. In the past, one might lament Japan's very low TOEIC or TOEFL scores, but without a clear sense of what these scores really mean. I would argue that by compiling a list of 'can't do' descriptors, educators, policy makers, and business leaders in Japan will realize more fully that the cost of having most employees in the lower two levels is very high indeed. This is particularly true nowadays, as the *lingua franca* role of English (ELF) rapidly expands globally.

Global catastrophes such as the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant triple melt-through, ongoing and only partially mitigated, make clear that ordinary "representative democracy" and typical appointed, unaccountable bureaucracies are inadequate to the challenges and dangers facing human civilization, and indeed, the entire biosphere. The level of direct citizen involvement arguably needed now -- such as direct election of bureaucracies and regulatory agencies of various kinds – is possible only with high-level education, and *lingua franca* English as a means of sharing that information. Sophisticated machine software may facilitate communication at lower levels, but there will be no substitute for direct, high-level communication in *lingua franca* English if we are to deal proactively with the enormous challenges we face.

Works Cited

CEFR-J website. Web. 1 September 2013.
<http://www.tufs.ac.jp/ts/personal/tonolab/cefr-j/english/index-e.html >

Council of Europe: *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment.* PDF file. Web 1 September 2013
<http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_en.pdf>

Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing Proficiency in English for International Communication (Provisional translation). PDF file. Web 1 September 2013.
<http://www.mext.go.jp/component/english/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2012/07/09/1319707_1.pdf>

MEXT website. Web. 14 September 2013.
<http://www.mext.go.jp/english/elsec/1319701.htm>

Negishi, Masashi, Takada, Tomoko, & Tono, Yukio. (2011). "A progress report on the development of the CEFR-J." PDF file. Web 27 September 2013.
<http://www.alte.org/2011/presentations/pdf/negishi.pdf>

Richards, Jack. and Bohlke, David., (2012), Four *Corners*, Teacher's Edition, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Tono, Yukio and Negisihi, Masahi. "The CEFR-J: Adapting the CEFR for English Language Teaching in Japan." Framework & Language Portfolio (FLP) SIG Newsletter #8, September 2012. PDF file. Web 2 September 2013.
<http://www.tufs.ac.jp/ts/personal/tonolab/cefr-j/Tono&Negishi2012forJALT_FLPSIG.pdf>